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WHAT SHOULD AN EXAMINATION DISCLOSE AS TO THE ABILITY OF A STUDENT AT THE END OF HIS HIGH SCHOOL COURSE ?

This question is undoubtedly before the College Entrance Examination Board every time examination season rolls round. Is the student of the secondary school on graduation day the same student who enters college? If we agree that he is, then the examination set by the Committee should be along lines similar to those followed by his instructors in high school, if the examination is to find out *how much* he knows, not what he does *not* know. His best will not then be known for he plays his best game always on the home diamond. Such an examination can be set only by those who are thoroughly familiar with the secondary schools, who trust them and have faith in their purposes, jointly with those who know accurately what work is beyond the entering college Freshman which must be built on the secondary school foundations, the colleges beginning where the secondary school left off.

It would be interesting to the colleges to hear some criticisms among secondary school teachers when the hour hand points to the time for filling out those matriculation blanks—the duodecimo pages, the title, author, etc., of each and every book read in the three or four years and each blank different, some asking the average of the boy or girl, the number of weeks, the recitations per week and then as though the scribe had not given his last spark of vitality, a column for remarks is provided, which, if filled out at *that time*, would not form enjoyable reading. Why all this if examinations are given? We know it is never read, for if the number of pages is left out it does not interfere at all; if even whole books were omitted no one would ever know unless the registrar should find such reading interesting on some less busy day and suddenly discover that the number of pages is short, therefore a book has been omitted. It is *maddening* simply *maddening*. As if that were not enough, the student is sometimes required to make a part of his examination paper for college the list of books he has read in the secondary school. A pure waste of energy. Were someone

to ask us to tell what we have read the last six months, there is hardly one here who would waste his brain energy on so unprofitable an exercise.

What is really the object of the examination paper? To find out what *power* a student has to handle the language studied. Does that mean whether he can write neatly and in proper order the cases singular and plural, can inflect a designated tense of a verb, can give the vocabulary forms of so many German nouns? Shall we then know that he has power to handle a language? Questions such as these were disapproved of in the reports given by the Committee of Twelve before the National Education Association as far back as December, 1898, in these words: "An objection to an exclusive, or even a predominant use of this type of question is that it teaches the pupil to "rattle off" paradigms and rules but not to understand nor to use the language. Instead of learning to "think in German." as the phrase is, he learns to think grammar in the terms of his text-book. Were the colleges to require that sentences be written containing the various cases of the nouns cited, the specified tense of the verbs, then would appear what is really wanted, the ability or lack of ability to handle the language. An examination in carpentry would certainly not ask how many two-penny nails in a pound, for that is self-evident or how many keys accompany a Yale lock? The candidate would not be asked to describe a saw or a plane, but with saw, plane, nails, etc., he would be asked to make something, following specified plans, perhaps even to make the plans, until the unit was completed, be it a room or a miniature house.

Let us look at a few of the requirements of different colleges, for we are here for constructive criticism.

I. **Reading.** The number of pages of reading required in preparation for the various colleges ranges from 500 to 700 for the three unit credit. It is recommended by the colleges individually that this amount shall include classical and contemporary prose and poetry; still another says that if a classic is read then let it be only one; another declares that not more than one-third ought to be Lessing, Schiller and Goethe; still another strongly urges that besides the 600 pages there be "some rapid home reading of about 100 pages or *more*." Sometimes the college even specifies that the page shall be of a certain size, but I have never yet seen anywhere

stated how wide the margin of the page ought to be. Perhaps faith in the publisher makes that unnecessary. It may be remembered, however, that he too regulates the number of pages to the story. Could the Departments of Modern Languages not be content with knowing whether the ground covered meets with the requirements of the College Entrance Examination Board? That could be answered quickly and it is a method followed almost entirely by the Departments of English.

Even after the number of pages has been stipulated and the titles of books suggested, the examination based on this requirement at one college may contain *no* translation into English at all, while at another the translation of 22 lines or more is required. The examination at one college contained 62 lines of translation. Does this seem to you incongruous? If it does, then we agree, I hope, that *some* recognition of the completion of this work should be shown, some work should appear on the examination paper and be credited. It should not be considered merely as an asset. One can estimate a student's ability to translate into English, have him show that he understands what he reads, on the basis of twenty-five lines as well as on the basis of 2,500 lines. There is no value in length except for promoting carelessness, and inaccuracy in the English version, for only a certain amount can be well done in the designated time. A good translation is a work of care and of thought. If we do not believe this, let us pick up a piece of difficult German and give ourselves only time to write down the English. Then on reading our own rambling thoughts aloud, I am sure we shall find nothing flattering.

II. Grammar.

A. Here are some of the Grammar questions asked:

Conjugate in the second person singular the verb "mitnehmen" in all tenses, indicative, subjunctive and conditional mood, active and passive voice. Why this number and person? Is it because it is the most important? Is it because work in college will be based on it? Suppose the second person singular of verbs were left out of all grammars used in America, and this has been suggested, what would the American boy or girl lose by the omission? Why not ask for half as many or one-fourth as many forms and require a *usable* person and number in correct sentences? Will the isolated

forms help him? Will he ever meet them, standing solitary and alone?

B. Now another question: Übersetzen sie Folgendes: The children were told a pretty story by their teacher and then they had to tell it to her again. State and explain the case of every noun in the sentence.

Does the question require the case in the English sentence in order that it may be understood before it is translated, or does the question refer to the case after the sentence is translated into German? Or must the student decide that? If the latter is meant, would not a correct translation satisfy or an incorrect sentence show that the case was not known and could therefore not be explained? This, question might profitably have given place to one asking for information not already given in the sentence itself.

C. Give with the definite article the nominative and genitive singular and nominative plural of certain nouns in the text.

These forms seem to be useless if, as in some instances, the context shows very plainly the case and gender, and worthless unless the student can make use of them in sentences. The latter can be done almost as quickly as the former, and tests the ability of the student from several points of view. Whereas, the forms simply test memory.

One can readily see the difference in value between those questions given and the following:

1. Distinguish in meaning between "verschwenden" and "verschwinden" "einzeln" and "einzig." Write substitutes for "unterdessen," "Kampf," "bloss," "es ihnen beliebte."

2. Illustrate by two sentences the difference in the use of "aber" and "sondern."

3. In lines 19 to 24 change the indirect discourse to what the boy actually said.

4. Give as many derivatives of "kennen" as you are familiar with, and use five of them in sentences.

5. Show in sentences the several uses of "wollen."

6. Answer in complete sentences: If you had been in Europe when the war broke out, what would you have done? If you were there now, what would you do? If your uncle is there now, what is he doing, perhaps?

If the question should be asked here, are the paradigms no longer memorized, are the synopses of verbs no longer given, are rules no more learned by rote? The answer would have to be, "Indeed they are!" But the teacher who is letting the declensions of nouns, the vocabulary forms, the synopses of verbs satisfy for complete grammar work, etc., that teacher is not heeding the instruction of prominent educators of to-day, who in strong terms denounce the teaching of isolated facts, isolated words. In Dewey, *How We Think*, "symbols stand for certain meanings to an individual only when he has had experience of some situation to which these meanings are actually relevant. Words can detach and preserve a meaning only when the meaning has been first evolved in our own direct intercourse with things. To attempt to give a meaning through a word alone without any dealings with a thing is to deprive the word of intelligible signification." Compare also Crane, *Changing the Viewpoint*: "Facts acquired while doing have glue on them and in them". Nor is that teacher complying with the recommendations of the Committee of Twelve of the Modern Language Association of America, which in 1898 made this statement: "It appears, then, that the day of the pure grammar method is past; but, while devising a system more in accordance with the principles and possibilities of our times, let us not forget that the old-fashioned way had its good features."

Here are two questions given on the model test in this report of 1898 for the purpose of showing in a general way the kind of test which a candidate ought to be expected to pass upon completing the three year requirement.

A. Explain the use of "sein" and "haben" as auxiliaries of tense and put into German:

1. The boy has fallen into the water.
2. He has traveled much, but seen little.
3. I have remained too long.
4. I have been sitting in my room all day.
5. You have slept two hours.
6. The child has fallen asleep.

B. How do modal auxiliaries differ in conjugation from ordinary weak verbs, and how from strong verbs?

Put into German:

1. I will tell you something.
2. We cannot go.
3. He had to stay at home.
4. I should like to know.
5. She will not be permitted to come.
6. I have not been able to see him.

III. Composition.

For the three unit or "Intermediate" requirement, a student must be able to write (a) a number of disconnected sentences which merely teem with rules, so that his thought changes with each sentence, or (b) a connected passage based on a given text, or it may be (c) a connected passage having probably no reference to the rest of the paper. (d) free composition on one of several different themes sometimes the line of thought or content being suggested. (e) free composition on three or four of four themes mentioned, or (f) there may be faulty German to be corrected, for example, "Gerade zu derselben Zeit einer der kleinsten Knaben lief so nahe an dem Pferde heran, dass der Kutscher auf dem Wagen sie nicht konnte mehr zurückhalten." This is a true example. Of all phases of grammar the one chosen, as you recognize, was that of *word order*.

How I should like to take the latter examiner into a classroom where an earnest teacher is illustrating in German that one phase of the subject probably more unlike English than any other—word order. The class is attentive, is eager to get it right and by dint of hard labor, of constant use of the inverted or transposed forms of expression by the teacher as well as by the child, the latter begins to have a feeling for the natural German word order and at the end of the composition work he seldom makes a mistake. Let us suppose that he knows the subject. Is the question good? Is it logical? Is it scholarly? If not, what is the object of such a question on a three unit examination? Why call his attention to something wrong? Do we learn to speak English from association with those who speak it incorrectly? What does one learn from such a question? What does the examiner learn from such a question? Could not a sentence have been required in which at least two types of word order were contained? A number of other

points in the same sentence would have testified, in addition, to the preparation of the student.

Of all these types of composition, and you recognize no two alike, the one which appeals to the secondary school most, the one that is a test of what the boy or girl really knows is the one (d) in German on themes in some way touching the life and thought of the boy or girl at that age. The next types would be, of course, the formal connected composition, (b) and (c). The others are simply inventions for the occasion, uninteresting, illogical in thought because disconnected and do not bring out any feeling for the language studied.

So far little has been said of the type of examination presupposing three years preparation and yet surpassing in difficulty and amount the BC examination of the College Entrance Examination Board. The full three hours is required for merely writing, with no opportunity for thinking. Any one can set such an examination. There are few who will be party to so heinous a crime against the innocent.

It is encouraging to see that credit will be given by a few of the colleges for oral or aural tests. Of course there will always be some who will want the 700 pages of reading, plus perfect grammar preparation, plus faultless composition, plus the 18 poems, plus ability to speak the language and to understand lectures and take notes on them in the foreign tongue, notwithstanding the additional time the use of the language in the secondary school must of course take.

It would seem a fair arrangement, fair to both colleges and secondary schools, if the College Entrance Examination Board would set a written examination to count 70 points only and leave it to each college either to admit the student on the basis of this written work or give him the opportunity to raise the percentage thirty points by an oral or aural test.

Much remains still to be done and if the secondary schools are not following the recommendations of the Committee of Twelve, have not yet gotten into line in the twenty years that have elapsed since this report of the committee came out in print, then students from those schools should be refused admission to college and those students who are prepared along the lines suggested by the colleges themselves should not be subjected to an examination based on a

grammar method when that method has been condemned by the Committee of Twelve, especially since this committee is quoted in almost every college catalog as authority for the requirements of the college. When we look at the examinations set by the College Entrance Examination Board, it is not quite clear whether the colleges are following the example of the College Entrance Examination Board or the College Entrance Examination Board is following the example of the colleges.

I wish to make a plea for a more modern type of examination, one which stands by the secondary schools if those schools are striving to follow a course which will prepare students to do the thing the colleges ask and the thing which the colleges more and more are stressing—a preparation in three years sufficient to enable the student to understand lectures in German. Of course he must also be able to take the notes in the language, or to do what is more difficult, to perform lightning feats of translation, if he takes his notes in English.

We are going backward two decades when we ask such questions as those given for the three year requirement or C₃ in the Comprehensive Examination of September, 1916. I refer to (a) and (b). Decline the singular of "der deutschen Völker." Give with the definite article, the nominative and genitive, singular and the nominative plural of "Walde," "Zeiten," "Herzen," "Ketten," "Verräter." (b) Give with the third person singular of the present indicative active, the principal parts of "stiess," "rief," "herabgezogen," "überfiel," "nahm." I have read you the corresponding questions submitted in 1898 and I believe you agree with me that the requirement of the *facts* in grammar, followed by sentences to show whether the boy can put into practice what he has said, is far in advance of the two of 1916 just cited.

I wish to make a plea for flexibility in the type of examination, so that the secondary school may not narrow its course to fit the examination,—a *variable* examination, one which will have a surprise or two each year, entirely within the requirements of a three-unit examination as recommended by the College Entrance Examination Board, but one that may not be anticipated in its entirety of content and form by the secondary school. I wish to make a plea for an arrangement of the German examination analogous to that of the French with sufficient material in each

Part to satisfy the requirements without its being necessary that the student take Parts II and III, for instance, for the three-unit requirement. The French is arranged in three divisions, for C₂, C₃, C₄, whereas in German the candidate must take two of the four Parts I and II for C₂, II and III for C₃, and III and IV for C₄. We shall have better thought out examinations I believe, if the Board does not have to feel that Part II must be suitable for C₂ as well as for C₃, and Part III serve the purpose of C₃ as well as C₄. There may be a definite reason for the arrangement as it exists, but I am not familiar with the reason and can think of none myself. It gives each examination an appearance of extreme length, especially is this true of Parts I and II, and also of repetition of material, the increased difficulty not being sufficient to warrant the students taking what seems to be each time two examinations. The French has the variety of prose and poetry, as well as a variety of thought within both the prose selections and the poetry. The German prose, on the other hand, is all historical and allows the imagination no play.

I wish to make no plea as to the *difficulty*. The examinations are not too difficult for the students; in fact, they might be more difficult if they were of such a nature as to draw the student out more and make him show his *power* more.

What I have said has been as one speaking *for* the secondary schools on the subject of College Entrance Examinations, and this I have tried to do faithfully. Had I been asked to give the point of view of the colleges as a teacher in a secondary school sees it, I should have given you an entirely different paper. Whatever criticism may come from the colleges belongs to the program committee for having asked me to be the exponent of the secondary schools.

What I have said applies to the well organized city high school, for I know it best, but to a degree, also to the private school. It *cannot* apply to that type of high school which although known as "first class" cannot always depend upon having a language specialist for the modern languages. The Boards of Education must employ sometimes the teacher who can do several things equally well. If the colleges feel that I am either uninformed or misinformed, I shall be glad to be informed, for in one class we are preparing for a number of women's colleges and co-educational institutions, so the class must steer a course sometimes between Scylla and Charybdis.

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